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Convention on Biological Diversity

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Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the General Assembly, pursuant to its request in resolution 52/201 of 18 December 1997, the attached report of the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

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Annex

Convention on Biological Diversity

Report of the Executive Secretary

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I. Introduction

1. In paragraph 12 of its resolution 52/201 of 18 December 1997 the General Assembly invited the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity to report to it on the results of future meetings of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention.

2. The Conference of the Parties held its fourth meeting in Bratislava from 4 to 16 May 1998. It was attended by over 1,300 participants from 152 countries and took 19 decisions on a wide range of issues. The meeting marked the conclusion of the first medium-term programme of work for the Convention and the Conference of the Parties adopted a programme of work that will guide the development of the Convention for the foreseeable future. The decisions reaffirmed the ecosystem approach and adopted programmes of work for marine and coastal biodiversity (decision IV/5), forest biodiversity (decision IV/7), the biodiversity of inland water ecosystems (decision IV/4) and agricultural biodiversity (decision III/11 and IV/6).

3. The Conference of the Parties also adopted the following decisions:

IV/1. The ecosystem approach, indicators, monitoring and assessment, alien species that threaten ecosystems, habitats or species and launching of a Global Taxonomy Initiative;

IV/2. The operations of the clearing-house mechanism;

IV/3. Issues related to biosafety in particular the negotiations for a protocol to the Convention to address the transboundary movements of organisms modified by biotechnology;

IV/8. Access to genetic resources and sharing the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources;

IV/9. Further implementation of the Convention's provisions regarding indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles;

IV/10. Incentive measures, public education and awareness, and impact assessment and minimizing adverse risks;

IV/11. The effectiveness of the financial mechanism;

IV/12. Additional financial resources;

IV/13. Additional guidance to the financial mechanism;

IV/14. National reports by Parties;

IV/15. The relationship of the Convention to the Commission on Sustainable Development and to other international agreements, institutions and processes of relevance;

IV/16. Institutional matters and the programme of work.

4. The full text of these decisions are available from the secretariat or can be obtained from its homepage (www.biodiv.org).

5. Implementation of the first medium-term programme of work for the Convention has seen the establishment of a dynamic institutional structure to develop the normative basis of the Convention, evolution of a process for promulgating decisions by the Conference of the Parties, and the elaboration of a basic paradigm for development of the substantive norms of the Convention.

6. The focus of the programme of work for the next few years is on implementing the general commitments of the Convention. With a scope as ambitious as that of the Convention, a major challenge for the implementation process as it moves into the next

phase is to find a balance between pursuing the truly holistic and integrative approach demanded by the Convention and at the same time being focused enough to allow concrete development of its provisions, building, where possible, on ongoing processes and programmes.

II. Thematic programmes of work

7. The programmes of work on marine and coastal biodiversity, agricultural biodiversity, forest biodiversity and the biodiversity of inland water ecosystems provide the basis for the development of clear and meaningful norms for each theme and the framework through which to pursue the integrative approach in a focused and effective manner. Each programme outlines a vision for future work and identifies expected outcomes and products, a timetable for their development and the means to achieve them. Most importantly the decisions indicate the type of final products or instruments expected from each programme and the process for developing the normative basis of the Convention with respect to the particular theme. They include manuals of best practice, guidelines, codes of conduct, guidance for the institutions of the Convention, criteria, indicators, standards/labelling schemes, and protocols.

8. Implementation of each of the programmes is undertaken by the Convention process in a broadly similar fashion. First, a review of existing efforts is undertaken to identify synergies and gaps within the existing institutional framework. The review mechanism is coordinated by the secretariat, supported in some instances by either informal inter-agency task forces or ad hoc groups of experts. On the basis of the review the secretariat develops programmatic links with relevant organizations to promote the purposes of the Convention and, where appropriate, begin the process of developing guidance and tools in areas identified as requiring specific attention to assist Parties with implementation. Periodically the advice of the Subsidiary Body of Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice is sought. Results of this work are produced and disseminated to Parties and other stakeholders through regular communication and meetings, cooperation and the clearing-house mechanism of the Convention for their application, evaluation and further refinement.

A. Marine and coastal biological diversity

9. Decision IV/5 adopted a programme of work with the aim of promoting implementation of the Jakarta Mandate on Marine and Coastal Biological Diversity. The programme has benefited from several years of preparation. Marine and coastal issues were the thematic focus of the first meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) and the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) both of which were held in 1995, and was subsequently revisited by SBSTTA/2, SBSTTA/3 and COP/3. Preparations also benefited from the work of the first meeting of the Group of Experts on Marine and Coastal Biological Diversity under the Convention, which met in Jakarta, Indonesia, in March 1997. A roster of experts on marine and coastal biological diversity has been established to coordinate Parties' expertise and support the development and implementation of the programme of work.

10. The programme identifies important operational objectives and priority activities within the framework of five key programme elements: integrated marine and coastal area management (IMCAM); marine and coastal living resources; marine and coastal protected areas; mariculture; and alien species. The programme provides a framework for activities

to implement the Jakarta Mandate until 2000, although the framework is designed to be applicable on a continuing basis beyond 2000.

11. Key long-term products or instruments of the programme are:

(a) Review of instruments relevant to IMCAM;

(b) National and regional capacity in the field of IMCAM;

(c) Guidelines for ecosystem evaluation and assessment, with a view to identifying and selecting indicators for marine and coastal biological diversity;

(d) A collaborative network with a view to promoting ecosystem approaches to the sustainable use of marine and coastal living resources;

(e) Development of the knowledge base on the use of marine and coastal genetic resources;

(f) Pilot research and monitoring projects on the value and the effects of marine and coastal protected areas (MCPAs) or similarly restricted management areas on sustainable use of marine and coastal living resources;

(g) Criteria for the establishment of, and for management aspects of, MCPAs;

(h) Assessment of the consequences of mariculture for marine and coastal biological diversity;

(i) Preparation of the development of a global strategy on alien species that threaten marine and coastal biological diversity;

(j) Database of initiatives on programme elements.

12. Activities on a collaborative network to promote ecosystem approaches, the development of the knowledge base on marine and coastal genetic resources, and pilot research and monitoring activities on MCPAs are to start immediately. The Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity plans to prepare, for the fifth meeting of SBSTTA in January 2000, a review of instruments relevant to IMCAM and their implications; terms of reference for the ad hoc expert groups; criteria for establishment and management of protected areas; and identification of gaps in existing or proposed legal instruments, guidelines and procedures to counteract the introduction of alien species. The remaining products are tentatively planned for attention in the subsequent inter-sessional period.

B. Agricultural biological diversity

13. At its third meeting the Conference of the Parties established a work programme to promote the positive affects (and mitigate the negative impacts) of agricultural practices on biological diversity at ecosystem level, the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources of actual and potential value for food and agriculture; and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of such resources. The decision calls for a comprehensive assessment of the current international regime by the Executive Secretary, in close collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The programme has three key elements: an assessment of existing activities and instruments; development of case studies; and the development and implementation of national strategies on the basis of the guidance provided in decision III/11.

14. At its fourth meeting the Conference of the Parties focused on reviewing progress and highlighting areas that require specific attention rather than on initiating major new

initiatives. The Conference of the Parties supported the ongoing review process and reiterated requests for contributions regarding ongoing activities and existing instruments relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of agricultural biodiversity.

15. The secretariat, in conjunction with FAO, is synthesizing the submissions to the assessment that have been provided, to date, by some 50 organizations and 15 Governments. An international technical workshop, supported by the Government of the Netherlands and to be held in December 1998, will provide a peer-group mechanism to assist SBSTTA in undertaking a situation analysis (stock-taking) of agricultural biodiversity at the ecosystem level, establishing key issues and priorities and identifying ways and means of providing enabling environments and incentives for the conservation and sustainable use of agricultural biodiversity and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits.

16. It is planned that the fourth meeting of SBSTTA, in May 1999, will address the specific issue of the consequences of new technology on agricultural biological diversity, while the fifth meeting of SBSTTA, in January 2000, will consider the findings of the assessment with a view to recommending to the Conference of the Parties the priority areas, objectives, activities and processes for the multi-year programme of work on agricultural biological diversity.

17. From this work, possible long-term products include:

(a) Endorsement of the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources;

(b) Endorsement of and enhanced support to the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and the Global System for the Management of Farm Animal Genetic Resources;

(c) Assessment of agricultural biological diversity, based on existing information and global assessments in relevant areas;

(d) Guidelines and best practices on the topics identified for attention , including soil biota, pollinators and integrated land management practices and farming systems;

(e) Guidelines for incorporating agricultural biodiversity issues into specific sectors and subsectors, including guidance on sustainable technologies and incentive measures;

(f) A roster of lead and support institutions and of experts for different components of agricultural biological diversity at the ecosystem, specie end genetic levels;

(g) Mechanisms for ensuring coordination between agricultural and environmental institutions and for developing enabling environments and incentives for the conservation and sustainable use of agricultural biological diversity.

C. Biological diversity of inland water ecosystems

18. The programme on the biodiversity of inland waters is the latest of the thematic focuses to be added to the agenda of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Its preparation benefited from the experience gained from the development of previous programmes and was the result of the most sophisticated preparatory process of the thematic work programmes. The modalities for its preparation are looked to as the model for preparing future programmes and contain many innovations for other areas of the Convention. For example, the development of a joint work programme with the Convention on Wetlands is the first attempt to develop a detailed cooperative relationship with another convention process. The steps taken to develop this relationship will provide important precedents for other joint work programmes which are expected to be developed in the future.

19. Decision IV/4, with two annexes, contains the elements of the thematic programme for freshwater. The work programme endorsed by the Conference of the Parties is contained in annex I. Annex II contains a suggested timetable which the SBSTTA and the Executive Secretary are to consider in their work on inland waters.

20. Annex I is in four parts. Part A, on assessment of the status and trends of the biological diversity of inland water ecosystems and identification of options for conservation and sustainable use, is the most detailed section. Part B considers the provision of scientific advice and further guidance to assist in the national elaboration of annex I of the Convention; part C considers the review of methodologies for assessment of biological diversity; and part D emphasises the urgency of action needed on taxonomy.

21. Part A clearly distinguishes the roles of the various actors in the programme, with important roles outlined for the Executive Secretary, SBSTTA, the Parties, the Convention on Wetlands and the Commission on Sustainable Development. The Conference of the Parties decided that urgent attention should be given to the development of rapid assessment methodologies especially related to small island States. The decision also places priority on two activities for the Executive Secretary: compiling information and case studies for use by SBSTTA in its deliberations on improving understanding of the biodiversity of inland water, identifying its uses and its threats; and future work on management experiences and best practices.

22. It is expected that the fifth meeting of SBSTTA will consider implementation of annexes I and II; incorporation of the results of the sixth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development; modes of cooperation with the Scientific and Technical Review Panel of the Convention on Wetlands; relationship with the Global International Waters Assessment; rapid assessment methodologies; and advice on the joint programme of work with the Convention on Wetlands.

23. Key products or instruments of the programme include:

(a) Rapid assessment methodologies;

(b) Ecosystem-based management structures for stressed riparian systems;

(c) Development of annex I to the Convention;

(d) Guidelines for incorporating biodiversity considerations into other sectors;

(e) Guidelines on national fiscal, economic and legal measures which have an impact on biodiversity;

(f) Guidance on financial support measures which run counter to the objectives of the Convention.

24. The rapid assessment methodologies and the development of annex I to the Convention are expected to be ready for COP/5. The remaining products are expected to be developed in the following inter-sessional period.

D. Forest biological diversity

25. Forests, especially tropical forests, harbour more biodiversity than any other type of biome. As a result of their importance, the issue of forests has received considerable attention within the Convention process. The extent to which the Conference of the Parties and the other institutions of the Convention have been able to address this issue has, however, been complicated by the overlapping mandate of the Intergovernmental Panel on

Forests (IPF), and its successor, the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF). The Conference of the Parties has worked closely with the IPF/IFF process, adopting statements for the process, closely considering the products of the process and offering the services of its secretariat to the process. As a result of this close cooperation, it has become clear that the Convention could and should pursue development of certain areas before IFF concludes.

26. Decision IV/7 adopted a work programme on forest biological diversity which includes activities that the Parties felt important to the implementation of the Convention – activities that would provide a useful contribution to IFF, while avoiding potential overlap. The focus of the programme is on research, criteria and indicators, and the development of technologies necessary for the conservation and sustainable use of forest biodiversity.

27. The long-term objectives of the programme of work are to:

(a) Assist Parties to develop measures for enhancing integration of the principles of the Convention into their national forest and land-use programmes and forest-management systems;

(b) Provide a tool to national forest and land-use programmes for the implementation of the Convention at the national level;

(c) Identify traditional forest systems and promote their wider application;

(d) Identify mechanisms that facilitate the financing of relevant activities;

(e) Contribute to ongoing work in other international processes;

(f) Contribute to access to and transfer of technology;

(g) Identify the contribution of networks of protected areas to the conservation and sustainable use of forest biological diversity.

28. To achieve these objectives, the decision divides the programme into three sequential phases of three years' duration. This nine-year time-frame is flexible, in light of the longer-term programme of work of the Convention and the timetable of IFF. Interim reports are to be made to the Conference of the Parties at the end of each phase.

29. The programme outlines four activities for the initial phase of the programme:

(a) Synthesize existing knowledge of holistic and intersectoral ecosystem approaches that enhance integration of forest biodiversity conservation into forest management systems;

(b) Analyse ways in which human activities – in particular, forest-management practices – influence biological diversity and assess ways to minimize or mitigate negative influences;

(c) Develop methodologies for criteria and indicators for forest biodiversity;

(d) Develop research and technological priorities.

30. The decision broadly outlined the mechanisms for undertaking the programme of work, referring to the full range of institutional mechanisms available under the Convention, with notable references to liaison groups, networks of panels and inter-agency task forces, datebases and meta-databases, and remote sensing technologies. The decision places greater emphasis on a decentralized approach to development and implementation of the programme of work than do the other decisions. It places emphasis on cooperation with relevant international processes, in particular IFF, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment exercise.

III. Programme of work of the Conference of the Parties

31. The Conference of the Parties also adopted a programme of work to guide its work and the development of the Convention for the foreseeable future. The substantive priorities of the programme are laid out in appendix I below.

32. Implementation of these decisions is progressing. Central to their implementation is the meetings of the various bodies of the Convention. Appendix II below contains the dates and locations for these meetings.

IV. Cooperation with the General Assembly and other relevant institutions

33. A particularly pertinent decision for the General Assembly is decision IV/15, on the relationship of the Convention with the Commission on Sustainable Development, conventions related to biodiversity and other international agreements, institutions and processes of relevance.

34. The decision identified several key areas of cooperation. For example, it called for further development of cooperation with the other relevant conventions – in particular, the agreements adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the biodiversity-related conventions (the Convention on Wetlands, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, and the Convention on Migratory Species) – the development of guidelines on good management practices on protected areas and close cooperation with the World Trade Organization – in particular, the relationship between the Agreement on Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

35. With a view to further developing cooperation with the Rio Conventions, the Executive Secretaries of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on Combating Desertification signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on 31 July 1998, which not only outlined general measures for cooperation but also contained specific proposals on joint activities to support implementation of the Conventions, the development of joint scientific assessments, synergies in information management and liaison arrangements in New York.

36. The Conference of the Parties placed the utmost importance on further cooperation with the United Nations. It identified a number of critical issues on which it felt the Convention could contribute to the work of the General Assembly and the Commission on Sustainable Development. These were:

(a) The report on implementation of the Convention at the next review of progress achieved in the implementation of Agenda 21 by the General Assembly in the year 2002;

(b) The development and exchange of best practices on sustainable tourism with the Commission on Sustainable Development;

(c) The comprehensive review of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States;

(d) The review of the oceans and seas, and freshwater resources;

(e) The review of consumption and production patterns.

37. The Conference of the Parties requested that, based on submissions from Parties, the Executive Secretary provide inputs to the meetings of the Commission in order to ensure that any future work of the Commission in those areas fully incorporates considerations of biological diversity and makes full use of existing materials and national guidelines.

38. In order to assist with the development of this cooperation, the Conference of the Parties also called upon the Executive Secretary to explore modalities for suitable liaison arrangements in New York and/or Geneva. In this respect, discussions are well advanced with the secretariats of the Convention on Combating Desertification and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change regarding these modalities.

Appendix I

Programme of work: items for in-depth consideration

COP 5	Dryland, mediterranean, arid, semi-arid, grassland and savannah ecosystems Sustainable use, including tourism Access to genetic resources
COP 6	Forest ecosystems Alien species Benefit-sharing
COP 7	Mountain ecosystems Protected areas Transfer of technology and technology cooperation

Appendix II

Dates and venues of meetings

Dates	*Meeting*	*Venue*
15–19 February 1999	Sixth meeting of the Open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group on Biosafety	Colombia (tentative)
22–23 February 1999	Extraordinary meeting of the COP	Colombia (tentative)
24–28 May 1999	Fourth meeting of SBSTTA	Montreal
1–3 June 1999	Inter-sessional meeting on the operations of the Convention	Montreal
4–8 October 1999	Expert Panel on Access and Benefit-sharing	To be determined
24–28 January 2000	Ad Hoc Working Group on Article 8 (j)	Montreal
31 January–4 February 2000	Fifth meeting of SBSTTA	Montreal
15–26 May 2000	Fifth meeting of the COP	Nairobi